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SUBJECT: MLC NOMINATES BEMBA FOR PRESIDENT, ADOPTS PLATFORM FOR NATIONAL ELECTIONS

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Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

1. (U) Summary: The Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) held its party congress January 27-29 in Kinshasa in advance of national elections in 2006. The MLC unanimously nominated the party's chairman, Jean-Pierre Bemba, as its presidential candidate and adopted a national campaign platform. In his remarks to the MLC congress, Bemba laid out his vision for the party and the DRC, promising a grand political, economic and social transformation of the country. The MLC also endorsed the decision by the party's leadership to remove National Assembly President Olivier Kamitatu from his post as MLC Secretary General. End summary.

2. (U) The MLC held its first party congress in Kinshasa January 27-29 to organize its members for the DRC's national elections in 2006. On January 29, the congress voted unanimously to nominate MLC Chairman (and current GDRC Vice President for Economics and Finance) Jean-Pierre Bemba as its candidate for president. Bemba's nomination makes him the second member of the DRC's transitional government to declare publicly his possible intent to run for the presidency. (Note: Vice President Azarias Ruberwa was nominated in December by his party, the Rally for Congolese Democracy. End note.)

3. (U) In his acceptance speech before the MLC congress January 29, Bemba laid out his plan for the "transformation" of the DRC. Bemba said the MLC's plan centered on four main points: improving social welfare, promoting good governance, restoring state authority and security, and eliminating poverty through economic growth. Bemba, however, provided no details as to how he or the MLC would achieve these goals. Bemba said he would guarantee a new democratic political order in the DRC that would prevent the country from slipping into another dictatorship. The MLC chairman also said he would devote himself and the party to the "transformation" of the country's agriculture in order to capitalize on the DRC's largely untapped natural resources. Bemba highlighted his experience in managing the country's economy, claiming success in having tripled the country's budget during his three years as Vice President.

4. (U) Bemba also announced in his January 29 speech the creation of a new political umbrella organization, the Assembly of Congolese Nationalists (RENACO). The goal of RENACO, according to Bemba, is to bring together various political parties under the direction of the MLC and create a larger, nationwide political alliance.

5. (U) Absent from the MLC proceedings was National Assembly President Olivier Kamitatu. Kamitatu, until recently the Secretary General of the MLC, had been ousted from the party

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for exploring alliances with potential presidential candidate Pierre Pay Pay. The MLC's Board of Founders voted in December to remove Kamitatu from his MLC post and replace him with Budget Minister Francois Mwamba (reftel). The MLC congress endorsed the Board's decision and Mwamba addressed the congress at its opening session as the party's new Secretary General.

6. (C) Comment: Bemba's unanimous nomination as the MLC's presidential candidate comes as no surprise, as the party has become little more than an apparatus for Bemba to wield political power, and the MLC has no other legitimate national candidates. Bemba's chances of winning the presidency are limited, however. Bombastic, bullying and arrogant, he is widely disliked. His bloody past as a rebel leader is well known, as are reports of atrocities committed by his militia. Despite trumpeting his economic credentials, Bemba's record as vice president has been spotty, and he (along with others) have overspent their budgets and been implicated in corruption.

7. (C) Comment continued: The creation of RENACO, meanwhile, is an attempt to broaden support for the MLC against its main perceived political rival, the People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD), led by President Joseph Kabila. RENACO's creation also reveals the hollowness of

Bemba's justification for expelling Kamitatu from the MLC. Kamitatu was ostensibly expelled for fostering a relationship with other political groups, but now that Bemba has done the same it has become all the more apparent that Kamitatu represented a threat to Bemba's own position in the party. End comment.
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